



Intertextual Awareness in EFL Report Writing: Comparing Students' Use of Field-Based and Web-Based Sources

Tedi Rohadi^{1*}

*UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung¹
tedi.rohadi@uinsgd.ac.id¹*

Hendi Hidayat²

*UIN Siber Syekh Nurjati Cirebon²
hendihidayat@uinssc.ac.id²*

Herawati Fajrin³

*UIN Siber Syekh Nurjati Cirebon³
Herawf05@gmail.com³*

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***Corresponding author:**

Tedi Rohadi, English
Language Teaching
Department, Faculty of
Tarbiyah and Teacher,
UIN Siber Syekh Nurjati
Cirebon, Indonesia.

Abstract

This qualitative study investigates how EFL students engage with field-based and web-based sources in academic report writing, focusing on their intertextual strategies of selection, interpretation, and integration. Data were collected from 32 third-semester students through reflective questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and student report texts. Guided by Bazerman's intertextual typology and Canagarajah's translingual framework, thematic analysis revealed two distinct but overlapping intertextual repertoires. Field-based engagement fostered experiential curiosity, dialogic interpretation, and narrative integration rooted in cultural immediacy. In contrast, web-based engagement promoted algorithmic search behaviour, multimodal decoding, and citation-driven structuring. While both modes demonstrated strategic meaning-making, field-based practices reflected stronger authorial voice and epistemic agency. The findings suggest that pedagogical support should cultivate both embodied inquiry and digital literacy to enhance students' critical intertextual competence. Implications are offered for integrating hybrid source use into academic writing instruction and for future research on adaptive authorship in EFL contexts.

Keywords: comparative analysis, intertextuality, academic writing, field based, web based.

Introduction

In EFL contexts, where students often write in a language they are still acquiring, academic writing demands more than linguistic accuracy; it also requires the ability to engage critically with diverse sources, manage genre expectations, and assert an authorial voice. In the digital era, these demands are further complicated by the dual pressure of navigating real-world cultural data and algorithmically curated online content. Learners are no longer passive reproducers of authoritative texts; they are meaning-makers who must filter, interpret, and revoice information across modalities. As such, academic writing becomes a dialogic and intertextual act in which students negotiate language, epistemic position, and genre constraints in relation to audience, task, and knowledge systems (Kristeva, 1980 in Allen, 2011; Canagarajah, 2013). This negotiation is especially pronounced in contexts where both field-based inquiry and digital resources coexist, often unequally distributed in terms of power, visibility, and perceived credibility.

Scholars have increasingly advocated genre-based pedagogy as a framework that scaffolds rhetorical purpose, textual staging, and linguistic cohesion (Martin & Rose, 2008; Tardy, 2009). In addition, intertextual competence, understood as the ability to incorporate external voices while maintaining one's own, has become an essential objective in academic writing instruction (Hirvela & Du, 2013; Thompson & Tribble, 2001). Bazerman's (2003) typology helps conceptualize intertextuality as ranging from manifest (explicit citation) to constitutive (transformative integration), while Fairclough (1992) underscores how intertextual choices are shaped by power relations and ideological positioning. These dynamics are intensified in digital contexts, where students' selection processes are often guided by visibility heuristics, institutional cues, or search engine rankings (Tian et al., 2022; McGrew et al., 2018). Meanwhile, field-based practices such as interviews and ethnographic note-taking offer students' opportunities to engage with meaning that is immediate, embodied, and culturally situated. However, these practices often receive limited emphasis in writing pedagogy. A 10-year review of EFL writing studies shows fewer than 5% examined how learners integrate both field and web sources in descriptive genres, particularly at the undergraduate level in developing contexts.

Moreover, with the rapid diffusion of AI-assisted writing tools such as Grammarly, Quillbot, and ChatGPT, a new layer of complexity arises. These tools not only reshape sentence structure but influence how students position themselves in relation to sources, genre conventions, and academic expectations. While research has addressed their surface-level effects on grammar and fluency (Warschauer et al., 2023; Godwin-Jones, 2025), there is a growing need to examine how such technologies interact with genre-based writing and influence students' intertextual decisions, particularly within descriptive genres where narrative, culture, and structure intersect. This genre AI intersection remains underexplored, especially in EFL classrooms where access to models and mentorship may be limited.

This study addresses these gaps by investigating how third-semester EFL students at *UIN Siber Syekh Nurjati Cirebon* select, interpret, and integrate both field-based (e.g., interviews, observations) and web-based (e.g., articles, institutional websites) sources while composing genre-specific reports on Cirebonese wedding traditions. Conducted within Writing for Academic Purposes course, the study analysed student reports, reflective questionnaires, and interviews. The use of AI tools was explicitly prohibited throughout the study. Consistent with this policy, the data revealed no indications of student engagement with such technologies. The analysis draws on Bazerman's (2003)

intertextual typology and Canagarajah's (2013) translingual framework to explore how students navigate multiple knowledge systems and compose with varying degrees of epistemic agency.

This research makes several contributions. Theoretically, it synthesizes intertextual, genre-based, and translingual perspectives to offer a more situated understanding of academic authorship. Methodologically, it expands data sources beyond texts to include reflection and narration of student decision-making. Pedagogically, it foregrounds the need to design writing instruction that is not only genre-aware and digitally literate but also ethically grounded and locally responsive. In doing so, the study aligns with emerging calls for decolonial pedagogies in EFL education approaches that validate culturally embedded knowledge, student voice, and rhetorical hybridity in contexts shaped by global inequalities in information access and epistemic legitimacy.

Research Methods

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design in the form of comparative analysis inspired by Palmberger & Gingrich (2014), aiming to explore how EFL students select, interpret, and integrate field-based and web-based sources in academic report writing. The design allowed for a detailed comparison of intertextual strategies shaped by different modes of source engagement.

Participants

The participants were 32 third-semester EFL students enrolled in a “Writing for Academic Purposes” course at a state Islamic university. Six students were purposively selected as focal participants based on variation in reported source use and writing performance. Additionally, one course instructor was interviewed to provide pedagogical context and aid triangulation.

Data Collection

The study collected four types of qualitative data:

Table 1 Data Collection Technique

Data Type	Quantity	Purpose
Reflective open-ended questionnaires	32	To elicit students' source-use strategies and perceptions
Semi-structured interviews (students)	3	To probe decision-making and intertextual awareness
Instructor interview	1	To contextualize instructional expectations and writing practices
Student report drafts	32	To provide textual evidence of source integration

All data were anonymized, and informed consent was obtained from all participants.

Data Analysis

The analysis combined thematic coding with textual interpretation, guided by two theoretical lenses include Bazerman's (2003) intertextual typology and Canagarajah's (2013) translingual framework. Deductive codes were drawn from the distinction between explicit/implicit and manifest/constitutive intertextuality (Bazerman), while inductive patterns emerged through repeated reading of student narratives and writing samples. Particular attention was paid to language choices, rhetorical transitions, and expressions of authorial stance.

To enhance analytic rigor and maintain consistency, a researcher memoing process was employed throughout coding. Additionally, ChatGPT was used as a dialogic tool to support interpretive reflection, especially in identifying thematic overlaps and phrasing comparative insights more precisely. Final theme categorization was cross-checked against original data excerpts for accuracy and contextual coherence.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to institutional ethical guidelines. All participants gave written informed consent, and pseudonyms or alphanumeric codes (e.g., W02, D03) were used to ensure confidentiality. Participation was voluntary, and students' academic standing was not affected in any way.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the findings of the study, which investigates how EFL students selected, interpreted, and integrated field-based and web-based sources in academic report writing. Drawing from 32 reflective questionnaire responses, eight student interviews, and a collection of student writing samples, the study traces how learners navigated intertextual processes across different stages of source engagement. Three overarching themes were developed to structure the analysis: (1) Students' Strategies for Selecting Information Sources, (2) Students' Strategies for Interpreting Information, and (3) Students' Strategies for Integrating Sources into Academic Writing. Each theme captures contrasting yet interconnected practices shaped by the nature of the sources, whether experiential (such as interviews and observations) or digital (including online articles and institutional websites).

Thematic coding was conducted using a combination of deductive and inductive strategies. Bazerman's (2003) intertextual typology guided the deductive framework, focusing on the distinctions between explicit/implicit and manifest/constitutive source use. Inductive codes emerged from patterns in students' language, rhetorical decisions, and reflective reasoning. Canagarajah's (2013) translingual framework further informed the analysis by highlighting students' negotiation of meaning across linguistic, cultural, and technological domains.

Table 2. Dimensions and indicators of intertextual competence in academic writing

Coded Theme	Field-Based Source (Excerpt & Note)	Web-Based Source (Excerpt & Note)
Focus Selection	<i>"I chose to describe the siraman because it was the most fascinating and unfamiliar to my own culture."</i> (W02) → Emotional/cultural prioritization	Not evident

Coded Theme	Field-Based Source (Excerpt & Note)	Web-Based Source (Excerpt & Note)
Observational Framing	<i>"I took notes during the procession..."</i> (W01) → Curiosity-guided live data capture	Not evident
Keyword Use	Not evident	<i>"I searched on Google using keywords like 'Cirebon traditional wedding'..."</i> (W02) → Targeted web search
Credibility Check	Not evident	<i>"I checked if the site was official..."</i> (W03) → Source evaluation based on domain
Clarification	<i>"I asked one of the family members..."</i> (W03) → Meaning negotiated via direct inquiry	Not evident
Cultural Framing	<i>"The siraman ritual symbolizes..."</i> (D02) → Cultural logic embedded	Not evident
Comparative Insight	<i>"This tradition is very different from weddings in my hometown..."</i> (W02) → Cross-cultural lens	Not evident
Comprehension	Not evident	<i>"I was confused about 'midodareni'..."</i> (W01) → Used multiple sources + visual cues
Narrative Integration	<i>"After the siraman..."</i> (D03) → Sequenced, situated story	Not evident
Reflection Use	<i>"In my view, this ritual highlights..."</i> (D02) → Reflective stance and personal meaning	Not evident
Structural Awareness	<i>"I divided my report into three parts..."</i> (W03) → Chronological sequencing	<i>"I placed the 'midodareni' part..."</i> (W03) → Applied similar sequencing from web
Paraphrasing	Not evident	<i>"Throwing betel leaves..."</i> (D03) → Paraphrase with attribution
Quotation Use	Not evident	<i>*"According to budaya-indonesia.org..."</i> (D01)* → Quoted with attribution

1) *Selecting Information Sources from the Field and the Web (Experiential Curiosity versus Algorithmic Search)*

Students' selection of sources reflected two contrasting yet complementary intertextual logics: one grounded in real-time experience, and the other shaped by algorithmic access and institutional trust. Those who engaged with field-based sources tended to select content based on emotional resonance and cultural distinctiveness. For instance, one student chose to write about the siraman ritual because it was "*fascinating and unfamiliar to my own culture*" (W02). Another explained that they "*took notes during the procession,*" particularly focusing on unfamiliar elements (W01). These actions suggest that students were guided by curiosity, immediacy, and embodied observation, selecting what stood out as meaningful within the cultural context. This approach aligns with what Bazerman (2003) defines as constitutive intertextuality, where the source becomes part of the writer's evolving understanding, not merely a reference point. It also echoes Lesley & Matthews' (2009) concept of embodied literacy, wherein learning occurs through participation and attentiveness to lived phenomena.

In contrast, students using web-based sources relied on targeted keyword searches, such as "*Cirebon traditional wedding,*" and assessed site trustworthiness by verifying if the source was official or from a credible institution (W02, W03). This demonstrates an instrumental and procedural logic, where relevance is determined by search visibility and perceived authority. Tian et al. (2022) highlights how algorithmic filtering mechanisms, such as search rankings and domain reputation, shape students' exposure to information and influence their perceptions of what counts as valid or valuable. In Bazerman's terms, these are instances of manifest intertextuality, where the boundaries of source use remain explicit and citation-driven.

In synthesis, the field-based selection process was shaped by experiential curiosity: what students noticed, felt, and found unfamiliar in the moment. The web-based selection, in contrast, was shaped by algorithmic searchability and institutional cues of legitimacy. This comparative pattern, contrasting experiential curiosity with algorithmic search, reveals not only differences in how information is accessed but also in how students assign value to sources. Canagarajah's (2013) translingual lens encourages us to see these as adaptive intertextual negotiations across different knowledge landscapes. Rather than viewing one mode as superior, the contrast highlights the importance of pedagogical support that enables students to recognize and integrate both situated relevance and technical literacy in their academic source use. The table 2 below compares how students selected and interpreted sources across field-based and web-based modalities, highlighting distinct yet complementary patterns of engagement.

Table 3 Comparative analysis of source selection phase

Theme	Field-Based Source Use	Web-Based Source Use	Comparison Insight	Comparative Coded Theme
1. Select	Students selected emotionally resonant and culturally distinctive events (e.g., siraman), guided by live observation and curiosity.	Students used targeted keywords, relied on search algorithms, and checked for site credibility.	Field-based selection was embodied and experiential; web-based selection was algorithmically filtered and institutionally trusted.	Experiential Curiosity vs. Algorithmic Search

2) *Interpreting Information from the Field and the Web (Dialogic Engagement versus Multimodal Decoding)*

Students' meaning making unfolded in two contrasting ways. When working with field based data, interpretation grew out of dialogic engagement and cultural framing. One learner asked a family member about the seven kinds of flowers used in siraman (W03); another wrote that the ritual "*symbolizes physical and spiritual cleansing*" (D02). Such moments exemplify constitutive intertextuality (Bazerman, 2003) where understanding is co constructed through conversation and then woven directly into the text. Students further deepened their insights by comparing local practices with their own cultural backgrounds, as illustrated by one student's remark: "*This tradition is very different from weddings in my hometown*" (W02), indicating a reflective and cross-cultural awareness.

In the web based mode, interpretation relied on multimodal triangulation. A student who was "*confused about midodareni*" resolved the gap by checking two articles and reviewing images (W01). In this case, comprehension is supported by cross-text comparison, visual cues, and the resolution of contradictions, an approach that aligns with what Bazerman refers to as *manifest intertextuality*, where meaning is stabilized through explicit reference to multiple texts. Wette (2020) observes that such strategies are frequently employed by L2 writers who lack immediate cultural access, as they construct understanding by decoding and reconciling disparate online sources.

To sum up, field based interpretation fostered empathetic, dialogic insight, while web based interpretation prioritised textual decoding and triangulation. Viewed through Canagarajah's (2013) translingual lens, both approaches demonstrate students' capacity to negotiate meaning across social and semiotic contexts, whether through face-to-face dialogue or through multimodal navigation. Pedagogically, this contrast suggests the benefit of tasks that pair interpersonal inquiry with guided online triangulation, helping students integrate deep cultural framing with critical digital reading skills. The following table illustrates contrasting approaches to source interpretation across the two modalities. While both groups engaged in meaning-making, the nature of their interpretive practices diverged based on how information was accessed and situated. Field-based learners constructed meaning through social dialogue and cultural framing, whereas web-based learners relied on textual triangulation and multimodal navigation.

Table 4 Comparative analysis of source interpretation

Theme	Field-Based Source Use	Web-Based Source Use	Comparison Insight	Comparative Coded Theme
2. Interpret	Meaning-making emerged through dialogic engagement (e.g., asking locals), cultural framing, and cross-cultural insight.	Interpretation involved triangulating online texts, visual cues, and resolving contradictions independently.	Field-based interpretation fostered empathetic understanding; web-based interpretation prioritized textual triangulation and decoding.	Dialogic Interpretation vs. Multimodal Decoding

3) *Integrating Information from the Field and the Web (Narrative Embedding versus Textual Grafting)*

Students' integration strategies reflected contrasting modes of authorship depending on the source type. Those working with field-based material tended to construct chronological narratives that embedded personal observation and cultural

significance. For instance, one report began, "*After the siraman, the bride's family members took turns offering words of advice*" (D03), situating the event within a temporal and social flow. Reflective commentary also appeared: "*In my view, this ritual highlights the closeness of the family*" (D02). Another student explained how they structured their report into "before, during, and after" segments (W03), reflecting an intuitive genre awareness rooted in lived experience. These examples reflect what Bazerman (2003) calls constitutive intertextuality, in which outside texts (or experiences) are transformed and revoiced as part of the writer's epistemic position. Such integration is dialogic, agentive, and coherent qualities often associated with academic voice (Ivanič, 1998).

In contrast, students relying on web-based sources integrated information more conservatively. Their reports featured paraphrases or direct quotations, such as "*Throwing betel leaves is part of the ceremony...*" (D03) or "*According to budaya-indonesia.org...*" (D01). Although these citations were formally appropriate, they were often grafted onto the report structure with limited transformation or reflective input. Even when chronological framing was applied as in "*I placed the midodareni part in the 'before the wedding' section*" (W03). It was typically inferred from textual cues rather than experiential sequencing. This reflects what Pecorari (2003) terms source-dominant writing, where student voice is attenuated and intertextual presence remains primarily referential.

In short, the contrast between narrative embedding and textual grafting reflects differing degrees of epistemic agency. Field-based integration encouraged students to inhabit the writer's role by crafting meaning through narration, commentary, and structural choices, whereas web-based integration tended to orient them toward citation conformity and structural imitation. From a translingual perspective (Canagarajah, 2013), this contrast underscores the need for pedagogical scaffolds that promote critical uptake of source material: encouraging students not only to cite responsibly, but to reshape, reframe, and recontextualize sources within their own rhetorical purposes.

Across the stages of selection, interpretation, and integration, students demonstrated two overlapping intertextual repertoires: one characterized by embodied participation, dialogic engagement, and reflective authorship; the other shaped by algorithmic navigation, multimodal decoding, and source-dependent structuring. The contrast, framed in this study as Experiential Curiosity versus Algorithmic Search, Dialogic Interpretation versus Multimodal Decoding, and Narrative Embedding versus Textual Grafting, reveals not a binary opposition but rather a continuum of intertextual practices negotiated across modalities and constraints.

Bazerman's (2003) typology helps elucidate how students shift between implicit/constitutive and explicit/manifest intertextuality based on how they encounter and recontextualize sources. Canagarajah (2013) further positions these differences not as deficits but as fluid, adaptive negotiations across semiotic, cultural, and technological terrains. Whether engaging with local informants or navigating digital platforms, students emerged not as passive consumers of information but as selective curators and situated meaning-makers.

Pedagogically, these findings point to the need for scaffolded instruction that supports both cultural embeddedness and digital literacy. This might include the use of hybrid source synthesis templates, voice-positioning prompts, and intertextual competence rubrics, which are tools designed to help students not only cite sources accurately but also reframe and revoice them purposefully within their own rhetorical agendas. By explicitly cultivating both repertoires, educators can empower students to integrate diverse source types with greater confidence, agency, and nuance in academic

writing. The final comparison focuses on how students integrated information into their written texts. Field-based participants tended to weave source material into reflective, culturally grounded narratives, demonstrating greater authorial control and epistemic presence. In contrast, web-based participants often relied on direct paraphrasing or quoting, with limited revoicing of ideas. Table 4 summarizes these contrasting patterns of integration.

Table 4 Comparative analysis of source integration

Theme	Field-Based Source Use	Web-Based Source Use	Comparison Insight	Comparative Coded Theme
3. Integrate	Students constructed chronological narratives, added reflective voice, and explained cultural significance of events.	Students paraphrased or quoted sources with less authorial stance, often mimicking source structure.	Field-based integration emphasized authorial coherence and epistemic agency; web-based integration showed source dominance.	Narrative Embedding vs. Textual Grafting

Conclusion

This study has shown that EFL students' intertextual awareness in report writing is shaped by the nature of the sources they engage with. Field-based inquiry fostered embodied and dialogic strategies, as students selected emotionally salient content, constructed meaning through interpersonal dialogue, and integrated information into reflective, narrative structures. In contrast, web-based inquiry promoted algorithmically guided selection, multimodal triangulation, and structurally imitative integration. These dual trajectories reveal two valid but distinct repertoires: one marked by cultural immediacy and epistemic agency, the other by search literacy and genre conformity. These findings underscore that source-based writing is not merely a technical skill but a site of adaptive negotiation across cultural and technological contexts.

Future research could further explore these dynamics in more diverse settings and modalities. Longitudinal studies may trace how students develop intertextual competence over time, particularly when scaffolded by targeted interventions such as source synthesis workshops or dialogic genre modelling. Researchers might also integrate textual analysis with digital tracing tools (e.g., clickstream or keystroke data) to observe how students navigate between digital and experiential sources in real time. Comparative studies across institutional types, such as traditional and online universities or urban and rural contexts, would also deepen understanding of how environment shapes intertextual behavior. Finally, investigating how AI tools like ChatGPT influence students' voice, citation practices, and critical synthesis represents an important future direction in the age of hybrid authorship.

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